Washougal Woolen Mills, largest fabric plant of the Pendleton Woolen Mills, and largest fabric plant west of the Mississippi River is a tribute to the late C.M. Bishop. The insistence on quality, on integrity of the business, and the financial wisdom of Mr. Bishop proved vital factors in the growth and success of Pendleton products.

(A brief review of some highlights of Pendleton Woolen Mills, as they apply to Washougal Woolen Mills. Source of information: Alfred L. Lomax's book: "Later Woolen Mills in Oregon".)

With a loan of $4,000, the Washougal Woolen Mill was acquired by Clarence M. Bishop in August, 1912. The 60 feet by 120 feet three-story frame building was enlarged and was reopened with George Sault as superintendent, and 50 employees.

Early in May, 1918 Clarence Bishop started an operation at Vancouver, Wash., as an adjunct to the Washougal mill. The Vancouver mill was the first step toward garment manufacturing. Clarence envisioned men's shirts of colorful flannel and plaids, which the Washougal mill could weave very skillfully.

Clarence Bishop participated actively in the business. He and Mrs. Bishop were on a wool buying trip when word came on March 23, 1924 of a bad fire at the Washougal mill. It destroyed the preparation and finishing departments with a loss of $100,000, covered by insurance.

Out of the depths of depression, Clarence M. Bishop hired Ernest N. Brooke as superintendent and designer. He was a trained woolen mill man with a distinguished career. His association with the Washougal mill brought national and regional recognition of its production of fancy fabrics.

Earl C. Rogness, a young man from South Dakota, served originally at Washougal, but later was moved to the Portland office.

Charles K. Bishop, second son of Chauncey Bishop, had finished his education in 1939, and joined the company at Washougal. He is now vice-president of Pendleton Woolen Mills.

Not until 1939 did the company enter a serious advertising campaign, when modest ads were run in LIFE, Esquire, Outdoor Life, Field and Stream and Sports Afield.

In 1945, Clarence Bishop remembered James C. Aitchison and told him the Washougal Mill was in need of a superintendent and asked him out to look over the mill. He came out and looked over the mill, made acquaintance of Pendleton products, but most of all was impressed with the earnest confidence of Clarence Bishop. Aitchison accepted the position and brought a new touch of textile professionalism to Washougal products insuring top quality to the Blue and Gold label. He is now general production manager for all three woolen mills.

By 1949 Pendleton volume had grown eightfold from dismal 1932. One jacket caught the fancy of the consumer and Pendleton named it the "49'er" for the year it started. . It was a fortunate beginning because the famous Pendleton "49'er" was made from colorful Washougal flannel in plaids and patterns. It was a sellout from 1949 to 1957.

In 1953 an agreement was reached for the merger of the Washougal Woolen Mills into the Pendleton Woolen mills by the stockholders of the two corporations. It was a natural combination. Although new buildings had been added at Washougal for auxiliary departments, the production capacity of Washougal was limited. Sales were up 25% in 1953, and in 1954 increased another 20%.

A store was opened in Disneyland in 1954-55 and proved a great boon to the company every place.

The 1960's was a decade of continued growth. All fabric for the growing Nebraska garment operations in Omaha was shipped from Washougal. Keeping a careful balance between yardage production, garment production and customer orders required enlarged and more efficient weaving facilities at Washougal.

A new humidity controlled weave room with space for yarn storage and pre-loom preparatory operations containing 60,000 square feet to permit more efficient operation of the 120 looms was constructed in 1965. The latest expansion took place in 1971 and included approximately 100,000 sq. ft. to house sewing, finishing, sponging and shipping operations.

Clarence Bishop died July 11, 1969, sixty years after he and his brother Roy took over Pendleton Woolen Mills. His ability for deep concentration had worked out his plans. The company is a tribute to his tireless efforts in the management and guidance of this nationally renowned business, which is so vital to Washougal, and which looks with optimism on this community.

Pendleton Woolen Mills Washougal Branch